

The Flood of Years.

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William Lollen Bryant.

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THE FLOOD OF YEARS.



THE
FLOOD OF YEARS
BY
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

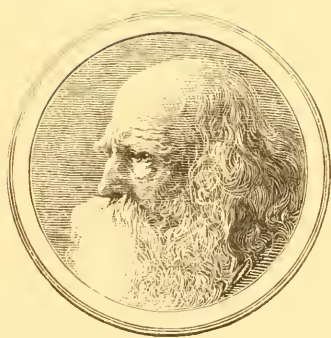
NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
1878



152

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THE ILLUSTRATIONS

DESIGNED AND ENGRAVED

BY

W. J. LINTON.



A MIGHTY HAND, from an exhaustless urn,
Pours forth the never-ending Flood of Years
Among the nations. How the rushing waves
Bear all before them! On their foremost edge,
And there alone, is Life; the Present there
Tosses and foams and fills the air with roar
Of mingled noises.

There are

There are they who toil,
And they who strive, and they who feast, and they
Who hurry to and fro. The sturdy hind—
Woodman and delver with the spade—are there,
And busy artisan beside his bench,
And pallid student with his written roll.
A moment on the mounting billow seen—
The flood sweeps over them and they are gone.
There groups of revelers, whose brows are twined
With roses, ride the topmost swell awhile,

And as



The sturdy hind—woodman and deliver with the spade—are there.



And as they raise their flowing cups to touch
The clinking brim to brim, are whirled beneath
The waves and disappear. I hear the jar
Of beaten drums, and thunders that break forth
From cannon, where the advancing billow sends
Up to the sight long files of armed men,
That hurry to the charge through flame and smoke.
The torrent bears them under, whelmed and hid,
Slayer and slain, in heaps of bloody foam.
Down go the steed and rider ; the plumed chief
Sinks with his followers ; the head that wears
The imperial diadem goes down beside
The felon's with cropped ear and branded cheek.

A funeral



A funeral train—the torrent sweeps away
Bearers and bier and mourners. By the bed
Of one who dies men gather sorrowing,
And women weep aloud; the flood rolls on;
The wail is stifled, and the sobbing group
Borne under. Hark to that shrill sudden shout—
The cry of an applauding multitude
Swayed by some loud-tongued orator, who wields
The living mass as if he were its soul.
The waters choke the shout and all is still.
Lo, next, a kneeling crowd and one who spreads
The hands in prayer; the engulfing wave o’ertakes
And swallows them and him.

A sculptor



A sculptor wields
The chisel, and the stricken marble grows
To beauty ; at his easel, eager-eyed,
A painter stands, and sunshine at his touch
Gathers upon the canvas, and life glows ;
A poet, as he paces to and fro,
Murmurs his sounding lines. Awhile they ride
The advancing billow, till its tossing crest
Strikes them and flings them under while their tasks
Are yet unfinished. See a mother smile
On her young babe that smiles to her again—
The torrent wrests it from her arms ; she shrieks,
And weeps, and midst her tears is carried down.

A beam



A sculptor wields the chisel. . . painter. . . poet.



A beam like that of moonlight turns the spray
To glistening pearls ; two lovers, hand in hand,
Rise on the billowy swell and fondly look
Into each other's eyes. The rushing flood
Flings them apart ; the youth goes down ; the maid,
With hands outstretched in vain and streaming eyes,
Waits for the next high wave to follow him.
An aged man succeeds ; his bending form
Sinks slowly ; mingling with the sullen stream
Gleam the white locks and then are seen no more.

Lo, wider grows the stream ; a sea-like flood
Saps earth's walled cities ; massive palaces
Crumble before it ; fortresses and towers

Dissolve

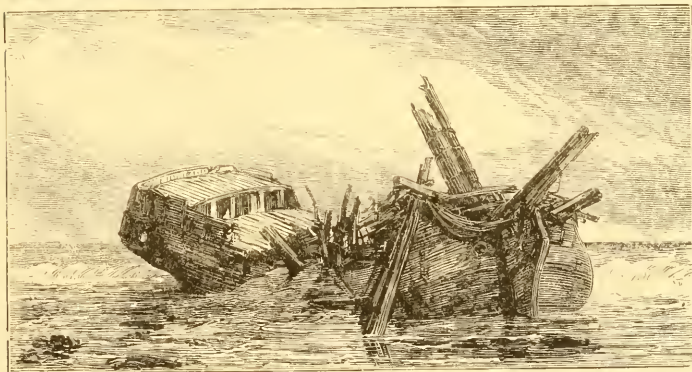
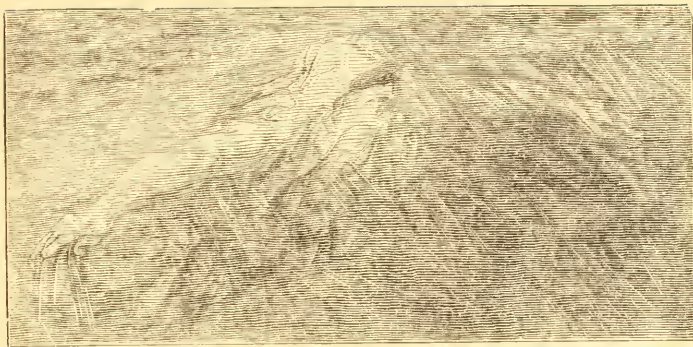


The rushing flood flings them apart. . . .

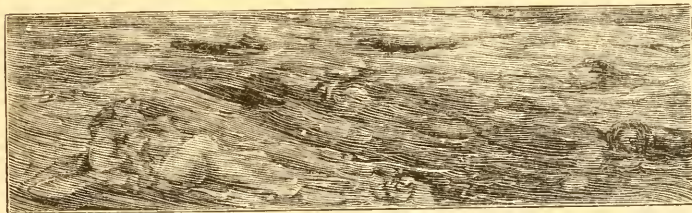


Dissolve in the swift waters; populous realms
Swept by the torrent, see their ancient tribes
Engulfed and lost, their very languages
Stifled and never to be uttered more.

I pause and turn my eyes and, looking back,
Where that tumultuous flood has passed, I see
The silent Ocean of the Past, a waste
Of waters weltering over graves, its shores
Strewn with the wreck of fleets, where mast and hull
Drop away piecemeal; battlemented walls
Frown idly, green with moss, and temples stand
Unroofed, forsaken by the worshippers.
There lie memorial stones, whence time has gnawed
The graven legends, thrones of kings o'erturned,
The broken altars of forgotten gods,

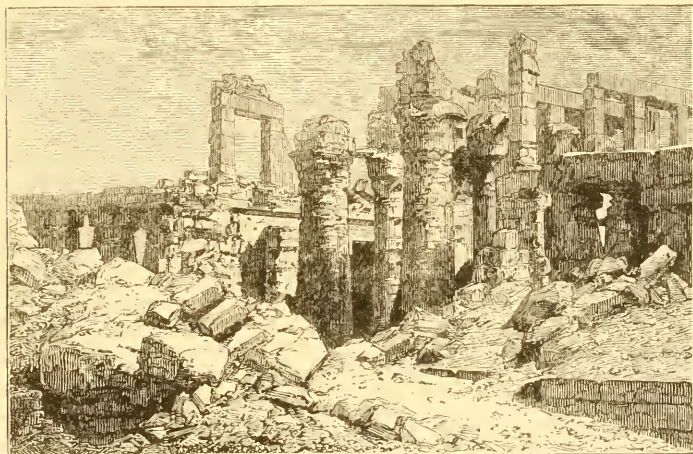


Where mast and hull drop away piecemeal.



Foundations of old cities, and long streets
Where never fall of human foot is heard
Upon the desolate pavement. I behold
Dim glimmerings of lost jewels far within
The sleeping waters, diamond, sardonyx,
Ruby and topaz, pearl and chrysolite,
Once glittering at the banquet on fair brows
That long ago were dust; and all around,
Strewn on the waters of that silent sea,
Are withering bridal wreaths, and glossy locks
Shorn from fair brows by loving hands, and scrolls
O'erwritten,—haply with fond words of love
And vows of friendship—and fair pages flung
Fresh from the printer's engine. There they lie
A moment and then sink away from sight.

I look,



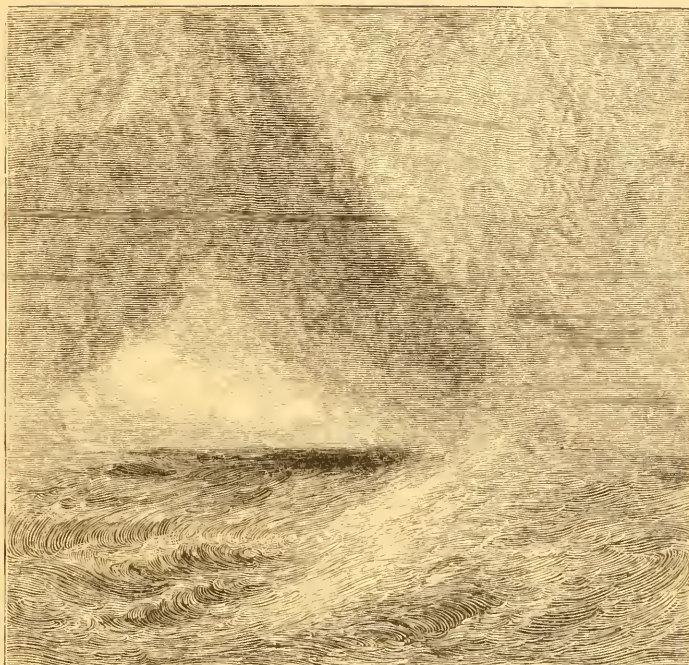
Temples forsaken by the worshippers.



I look, and the quick tears are in my eyes,
For I behold, in every one of these,
A blighted hope, a separate history
Of human sorrow, telling of dear ties
Suddenly broken, dreams of happiness
Dissolved in air, and happy days, too brief,
That sorrowfully ended, and I think
How painfully must the poor heart have beat
In bosoms without number, as the blow
Was struck that slew their hope or broke their peace.

Sadly I turn, and look before, where yet
The Flood must pass, and I behold a mist

Where



Where swarm dissolving forms, the brood of Hope,
Divinely fair, that rest on banks of flowers
Or wander among rainbows, fading soon
And reappearing, haply giving place
To shapes of grisly aspect, such as Fear
Molds from the idle air; where serpents lift
The head to strike, and skeletons stretch forth
The bony arm in menace. Further on
A belt of darkness seems to bar the way,
Long, low and distant, where the Life that Is
Touches the Life to Come. The Flood of Years
Rolls toward it, near and nearer. It must pass
That dismal barrier. What is there beyond?
Hear what the wise and good have said.

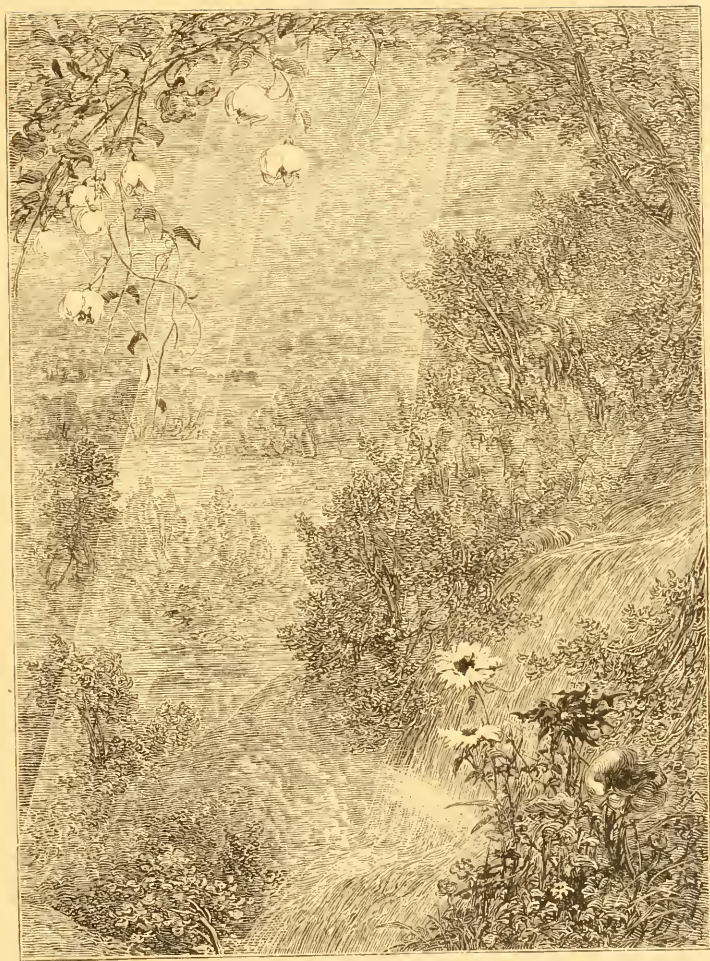
Beyond



Beyond

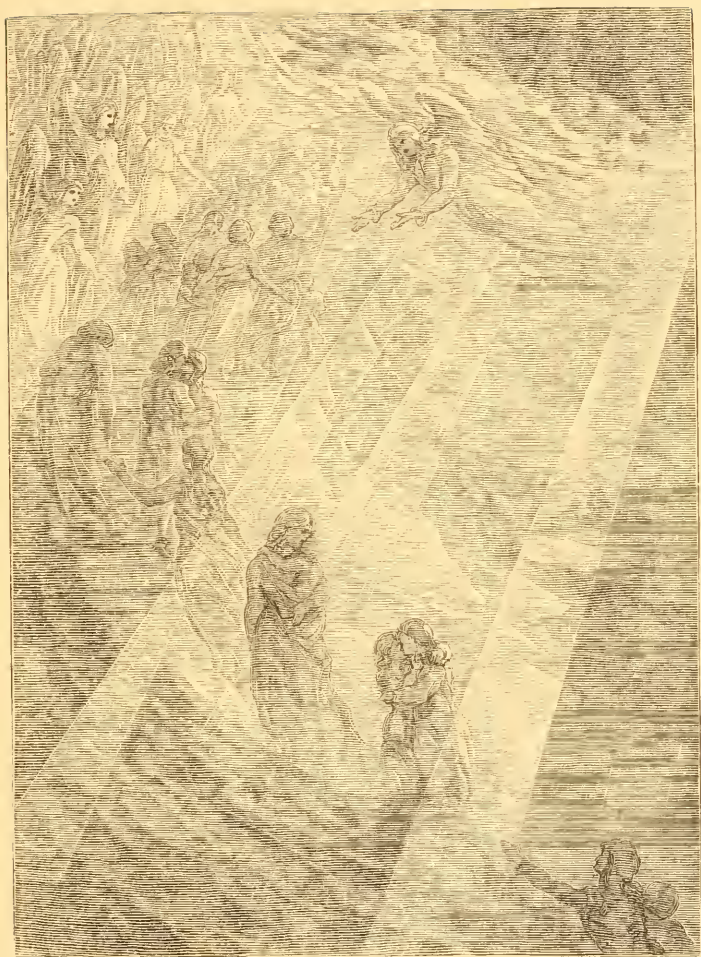
That belt of darkness still the years roll on
More gently, but with not less mighty sweep.
They gather up again and softly bear
All the sweet lives that late were overwhelmed
And lost to sight—all that in them was good,
Noble, and truly great and worthy of love—
The lives of infants and ingenuous youths,
Sages and saintly women who have made
Their households happy—all are raised and borne
By that great current in its onward sweep,
Wandering and rippling with caressing waves
Around green islands, fragrant with the breath
Of flowers that never wither.

So they pass,



So they pass,
From stage to stage, along the shining course
Of that fair river broadening like a sea.
As its smooth eddies curl along their way,
They bring old friends together ; hands are clasped
In joy unspeakable ; the mother's arms
Again are folded round the child she loved
And lost. Old sorrows are forgotten now,
Or but remembered to make sweet the hour
That overpays them ; wounded hearts that bled
Or broke are healed forever.

In the room



In the room
Of this grief-shadowed Present there shall be
A Present in whose reign no grief shall gnaw
The heart, and never shall a tender tie
Be broken—in whose reign the eternal Change
That waits on growth and action shall proceed
With everlasting Concord hand in hand.



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